

# THE SANCTITY OF THE SYNAGOGUE AND THE AMEN RESPONSE # 15



**DOES YOUR SYNAGOGUE HAVE A KOSHER MECHITZA?**

**IN THOSE SYNAGOGUES WHERE YOU CAN SEE WOMEN  
THE YETZER HARA RULES IN THE SYNAGOGUE**

**Responsa by Rabbi Eliyahu Guttmacher ZTK"l**

...In paragraph 6 there the Shulchan Aruch states that with closed eyes it is permissible to pray under such circumstances; but Ture Zahab, Magen Abraham and Eliyahu Rabbah (loc. cit.), by whose words we live, differ decisively with this view; Peri Hadash (ibid.) adduces proofs aplenty that shutting the eyes does not bring permission [to recite the shema' and pray].... So much can be said, then, in behalf of a lenient view, based on Shulchan Aruch Orach Hayyim 75. ...

...Our case is even more severe, for the Talmud states explicitly: R. Isaac said, A handbreadth of a woman's body constitutes an indecency [if exposed; and it is asked] To what does he refer? Shall we say, staring at a woman? but R. Shesheth has already declared ... Scripture tells you that whoever stares even at a woman's little finger, it is as if he stares licentiously. Rather, then, he refers to one's own wife when one must recite the shema' (Berachoth 24a). ..If such a sight sullies the eyes: Can there be a greater desecration than to regard women in a gathering for the sake of Heaven? O, the Heavens be confounded at this (Jeremiah 2:12). ... What argument can yet be advanced when in such a case women will be in view bedecked with hats and jewelry- in the synagogue, in the House of the Lord?

Can it be right for a man to go up and take a Torah scroll from the Ark, and then turn around, and standing elevated before the sacred Ark, have

women in his vision and come to entertain alien thoughts-all the while holding the Torah which writes of capital punishments by Heaven and beth din (Jewish religious court) for immorality?

Shall kohanim (priests) go up to give the priestly blessing and have their vision encounter defiling immodesty? And if they are supposed to close their eyes and not dare to look up, lest they see the women, the enormity of the snare is only too plain: for this very action will arouse within them impure thoughts at a time when extra holiness is needed, when they should fulfill the written injunction, Sanctify yourselves and be holy (Leviticus 11:44, 20:7); as the Sages interpreted it: If a man sanctifies himself slightly, he becomes greatly hallowed; if he sanctifies himself here, below, he is hallowed from above; if he sanctifies himself in the present world he will be hallowed in the future world' (Yoma 39). ....If our Sages spoke thus when the women did not go with heads or backs bared, what is there for us to say? Is it not the purpose of present-day women to thus attract men's glances? ...The synagogue would then become a place of which the Lord might well say, Who hath Required this of your hand, to trample My courts?.....

...Do you then fear that the women can decrease your earnings or your esteem? Cry out to them that they should take care, and not go at all to such a synagogue.....The Chafetz Chayyim writes (Mishnah Berurah 151, lb): "...iniquity becomes so much more heinous in a sacred place.... There is no comparison between sinning in private and sinning in the royal palace, in the king's very presence".....in Akedath Yitzhak, R. Isaac Arama also stressed that a public sin by a group is so much more serious a crime as to be of a different degree or quality from the private sin of the individual. These points apply with peculiar cogency and force to the question of mechitzah.

### **Rabbenu Yonah writes in Iggeret ha Teshuvah**

11) And it is forbidden for a man to look at a married woman from the Torah as it is written: (Bamidbar 15:39) "And you shall not go astray after your hearts and after your eyes...". And our Sages have said (Tanchuma Shelach 15) The heart and the eyes are the two agents of sin. And it is forbidden even to look at a

**single woman: "I have made a covenant with my eyes, and how should I think about a virgin?" (Iyov 31:1)**

**The majority thinks that the prohibition to look at women is only for pious or saintly people. It is forbidden to listen to their words (Derech Pikudecha, 35 Lo Taase)**

**And even if everybody ridicules him and shame him and say things to cause him anguish and remind him of his evil deeds, he should not abandon his piety because of the jesters, and he should think that this will constitute a great merit for him and it will be considered for him as Tzeddaka from being ashamed, and through this the Fear of G-d which is pure enters his heart and purifies his heart and body of all evil things, and he is helped from heaven to strengthen his fear of G-d and arrange things for him to do a complete Teshuvah. (Sefer Chassidim, Siman 7)**

**NOW THERE ARE FOOLS WHO ALLOW THEIR SYNAGOGUES TO HAVE A MECHITZA WHERE YOU CAN SEE WOMEN! NOT ONLY ARE THEY NOT DOING A MITZVAH BUT ON THE CONTRARY THEY CAUSE MANY PEOPLE TO STUMBLE IN SIN**

**MAYBE YOU NEVER HEARD YOUR RABBI TALKING ABOUT THESE THINGS FOR IT MAY NOT BE IN HIS BEST INTEREST TO TELL YOU. SO EVEN IF YOUR RABBI RIDICULES YOU FOR KEEPING THE SHULCHAN ARUCH YOU SHOULD BE STRONG AND GO AHEAD FOR IT MAY BE THAT YOUR RABBI BELONGS TO THE EREV RAV AND HE JUST DOES NOT WANT YOU TO KEEP THE TORAH AS IT SHOULD BE FOR MAYBE HE WOULD BE EXPOSED AS A FAKE IN THE EYES OF THE OTHER CONGREGANTS WHEN THEY SEE THAT A COMMON PERSON KEEPS THE SHULCHAN ARUCH TO A GREATER EXTENT THAN THE RABBI. AND WE ARE NOT TALKING ABOUT PIOUS PRACTICES BUT WE ARE TALKING HERE ABOUT KEEPING THE SHULCHAN ARUCH, SPECIFICALLY CONCERNING THOSE AREAS WHERE THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF OUR TIME ARE LAX ABOUT. FOR EXAMPLE, TALKING IN THE SYNAGOGUE IN THE MIDDLE OF PRAYERS, DURING THE KADDISH, GIVING TORAH LESSONS TO MEN AND WOMEN WITHOUT A MECHITZA, HAVING A DEFICIENT MECHITZA IN SHUL, LOOKING AT WOMEN WHICH IS SOMETHING FORBIDDEN, ETC**